

Cornelia Stevens, TOP Early Learning Centers

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CORNELIA STEVENS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TOP EARLY LEARNING CENTERS

What has been your career path? I began my career as a music therapist, but quickly gravitated to program management. Since then, I've worked for a wide range of organizations, including the Mental Health Association of South-Central Kansas as the director of compeer/volunteer services, ResCare Kansas Life Choices as a day program coordinator, Ohio Department of Corrections as the director of activity therapy and the Kansas Children's Service League as the south-central region director. I became the executive director of TOP Early Learning Centers eight years ago.

Who are your mentors and how have they influenced your career? My biggest mentor has been my mother. She had a children's theater growing up that served children from all racial and socio-economic backgrounds. On the surface, she taught us musical theater. In actuality, she taught us to have confidence, speak clearly, carry ourselves with pride, adapt to all situations and love and respect people who may look and be different than you. I didn't understand that these were life lessons she was teaching at the time, but these

qualities have helped shape me into the leader I am today.

Best advice for a woman wanting to enter education? Working in education is not just a career choice, it is a calling. Take time to learn about yourself and what you are passionate about. That passion will get you through the difficult times.

What do you like most about your job? Our mission is to deliver a high-quality early learning experience to children living in poverty, providing them the tools needed for emotional, academic, and lifelong success. I went back to college as a single mom when I was 25 years old. I am also the parent of a TOP graduate and can see the impact of our program in my adult daughter. My journey feels like it has come full circle but this time, I have the opportunity to lead our efforts to positively impact the future of the children and families we serve.

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